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Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

New York, 9-20 January 2006

Working paper submitted by Canada

Proposal for an intersessional programme of work to enhance implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

Summary

Effective implementation of the Programme of Action requires greater engagement by the international community. To this end, it is proposed that the Review Conference adopt an intersessional programme of work that would bring the international community together informally on a semi-annual basis to develop ideas and recommendations for consideration during formal meetings of States.

Work could be undertaken within thematic standing committees that would address clusters of substantive issues related to the question of small arms and light weapons. In addition, a contact group on communications and resource mobilization should be established to develop strategies to increase the popular and political will to address such issues and raise the resources required to fully implement the Programme of Action.

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Background

1. The proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons represent a major threat to peace and security. Small arms alone are instrumental in the deaths of approximately 500,000 people annually. Many, possibly millions more, fall victim to their indirect impact on sustainable development.

2. In the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, adopted in 2001, States expressed their determination to reduce the human suffering caused by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects and recognized that the international community had a duty to deal with the issue.

3. Among other things, the Programme of Action mandates meetings of States every two years to assess its implementation and a review conference in 2006. Several States, United Nations agencies, international organizations and non-governmental organizations are of the view that the current regime of meetings and other cooperative arrangements does not afford the small arms and light weapons issue the attention and dedicated resources that it warrants and that indeed are essential in order to fulfil the promise of the Programme of Action.

Proposal

4. It is proposed that the Review Conference adopt an intersessional programme of work that would bring the international community together informally on a semi-annual basis to develop ideas and recommendations for consideration during formal meetings of States.

5. Such an intersessional programme of work could serve to:

- Provide more frequent occasions to assess the progress of implementation of the Programme of Action
- Promote regular exchange of information, including lessons learned, thus enhancing the capacity of States to implement the Programme of Action
- Identify priorities for implementation of the Programme of Action
- Facilitate dedicated activity and discussions on the thematic areas contained in the Programme of Action
- Enable States to develop public awareness and resource mobilization strategies that will increase appreciation of the importance of the issue and generate the financial and technical resources required to fully implement the Programme of Action
- Provide additional opportunities to engage experts and representatives of civil society, including non-governmental organizations and parliamentarians
- Inform the proceedings and increase the effectiveness of formal meetings of States

Approach

6. An intersessional programme of work would be complementary to existing arrangements and would be undertaken in a manner consistent with the principles of inclusivity, partnership, openness, support and practical cooperation.

Participation

7. All interested Governments, international organizations and institutions and relevant non-governmental organizations and stakeholders would be invited to participate actively in intersessional meetings.

Semi-annual meetings

8. In order to sustain engagement by States on the implementation of the Programme of Action, Canada proposes that States meet twice a year. Meetings could be one or two weeks in duration. Many international bodies convene at least twice and sometimes three times a year. Given the importance and urgency of implementing the Programme of Action, meeting semi-annually is both feasible and desirable.

The programme

9. Intersessional meetings could focus on two primary elements: (a) reports by States on progress achieved in implementing the Programme of Action; and (b) the activities of standing committees on priority thematic issues.

10. Thematic areas could be addressed by standing committees, which would operate informally with procedural flexibility, albeit with sufficient structure to ensure effective proceedings. Each committee would carry out substantive work on relevant topics in order of priority.

11. A communications and resource mobilization contact group could assist in the development of strategies to generate the popular and political will and the financial and technical resources needed to put our ideas and our words into action.